

SIKKIM



GOVERNMENT

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**GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM
SOCIAL JUSTICE, EMPOWERMENT AND WELFARE DEPARTMENT
GANGTOK, EAST SIKKIM**

No. 700/SJE&WD

Dated: 12.11.2018

NOTIFICATION

Whereas, the Lepcha Tribal Community, one of the three ethnic communities of the State of Sikkim is the original indigenous inhabitants of the State;

And whereas, the State Government has deemed it expedient to notify Dzongu area, North Sikkim as '**Lepcha Indigenous Habitat**' in its Cabinet Meeting held on 29th September, 2018 for preservation, promotion and further enrichment of Lepcha indigenous Culture for sustainable development;

And whereas, the Primitive Tribe Welfare Board, Department of Social Justice, Empowerment and Welfare will act as Nodal Department for branding of Dzongu as 'Lepcha Indigenous Habitat'. The various line ministries, institutions, autonomous, bodies, Universities, Corporations, public sector undertakings under Government of India, other financial institutions and international organizations like United Nation Development Programme will be approached for technical guidance, funding and implementation of projects for sustainable development;

Now therefore, with a view to achieve the above objectives, the State Government is hereby pleased to notify Dzongu area as 'Lepcha Indigenous Habitat' for promotion, preservation and further enrichment of Lepcha indigenous Culture for sustainable development on the issues as may be notified separately by a separate Office Memorandum.

By order and in the name of the Governor.

**K. Sreenivasulu, IAS
Principal Secretary
Social Justice, Empowerment and Welfare Department**



**GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM
SOCIAL JUSTICE, EMPOWERMENT AND WELFARE DEPARTMENT
GANGTOK, EAST SIKKIM**

No. 714/SJE&WD

Dated: 20.11.2018

OFFICE MEMORANDUM

Whereas, the State Government has been pleased to notify "Dzongu Area", North Sikkim as 'Lepcha Indigenous Habitat' vide Notification Number. 700/SJE&WD, dated 20.11.2018;

And whereas, for the purpose of preservation, promotion and further enrichment of Lepcha indigenous Culture for sustainable development, it is deemed necessary to notify a brief outline for issues to be dealt with in regard to the said region/area;

Now therefore, with a view to achieve the above objectives, the State Government is hereby pleased to notify this Office Memorandum giving a brief outline and issues to be dealt with in regard to "Lepcha Indigenous Habitat" and the same are laid down as under, namely:-

"LEPCHA A PRIMITIVE TRIBE OF SIKKIM

Introduction

Lepchas are the autochthones or aboriginal inhabitants of Sikkim. They call Sikkim *Ney-Mayal Lyang* or *Renjyong Lyang* or in short *Mayal Lyang*. They love to call themselves *Rongkup-Rumkup* means the beloved children of Mother Nature and God. The Lepchas are confined and reside mainly in the State of Sikkim mostly in Dzongu areas of Sikkim. The history of the Lepchas can be drawn from old manuscripts and other unwritten sources like hymns/chanting by *Bongthing* (Priest) and *Mun* (Priestess) describing the legends, events, heroes, their adventures etc. The details of events concerning their ancestors, legendary heroes, and chiefs etc., passed down orally by the elders from generation to generation, also form another sources of their history. These sources indicate that lives of Lepchas have been closely related with the forests, hills, rivers, and places of Sikkim from time immemorial, centuries before the coming of *Guru Padma Sambhava* in the eighth century. The people of each sub-clan of the Lepcha tribe adopted a particular hill, cave and lake as their identity.

Lepcha the Aborigines of Sikkim

Different scholars both foreign and domestic mention about the aboriginality of the Lepchas of Sikkim:

J.D. Hooker (1854) wrote: "The Lepcha is the original inhabitant of Sikkim and the prominent character in Darjeeling".

G.B. Mainwaring (1876) loved to comment that "Their peaceful and gentle character is evinced by their numerous terms of tenderness and compassion and by fact that not one word of abuse exists in their language".

W.W. Hunter (1876) writes that "the Lepchas are considered to be the aboriginal inhabitants of the hilly portion of the district. At all events they are the first known occupiers of this tract and of independent Sikkim".

H.B. Rowney (1882) found that "The Lepchas inhabit the southern face of the Himalayas...".

L.S.S.O' Malley (1907) remarked that "the Lepchas are the aboriginal inhabitants of the country, who call themselves Rong, i.e. the squatters, and their country the land of caves".

J.C. White (1909) noted that "the aboriginal inhabitants of Sikkim are the Lepchas, and the language they use is Lepcha".

G. Gorer (1938), considered Lepchas as the only original people of the mountain tract: "the Lepchas are a Mongoloid people living in the Himalayas on the southern and eastern slope of Mount Khangchendzonga".

Census of India 1961 considered that "the Lepchas are the origins of the mountain forests surrounding the district of Darjeeling. Found in Sikkim, Darjeeling, eastern Nepal and western Bhutan, their habitat spreads over the territory".

The Gazetteer of Darjeeling (1980) ornamented Lepchas as the real autochthones of the eastern Himalayas. It states that the "Lepchas, the real autochthones of Sikkim and Darjeeling Himalayas numbered 12,470 and accounted for only 3.3 per cent.

Dr. S.K. Singh, IAS (Retired), the former, Director General, Anthropological Survey of India, Ministry of Culture, Government of India in his monumental publication on people of India (A National Project) noted that the "Lepchas are the original inhabitants" of Sikkim.

The Hon'ble Supreme Court of India, while passing the judgment on the petition filed by Mr. R.C. Poudyal in the related matter observed in February 1993 that the Lepchas are the "original indigenous inhabitants of Sikkim", published in All India Report (AIR) 1993 (Vol.80), page 1836.

Lepcha Population in Sikkim:

It is noted that Lepcha population in Sikkim is slowly increasing but their population is also decreasing compared to the total population of the state. Lepcha population of Sikkim and their percentage of total population of the state are as follows:

Year	Lepcha Population	Ten years	% of state total population.
1891	5762	-	18.92
1901	7313	+1551	—
1911	9031	+1718	11.29
1921	9021	-10	—
1931	13060	+4039	11.89
1941	12523	-537	10.31
1951	13756	+1233	9.99
1961	-	-	—
1971	22316	+4280	10.63
1981	23234	+918	7.34
1991	29854	+6620	7.35
2001	40586	+10732	7.51
2011	42909	+2323	7.03

The Lepcha Tribal Community was accorded the status of Scheduled Tribe; vide the Constitution (Sikkim) Scheduled Tribes Order, 1978. The population of Lepcha as per census 2011 is 42909. Lepchas were the aboriginal inhabitants of Sikkim Himalayas. This tribal community is not objectively prepared to compete with other relatively advanced groups of people and move ahead alongside the brother communities of the state due to their low level of economy, education etc.

To recognize this tribe as the vulnerable section of Sikkimese society and in order to prioritize in providing developmental schemes to this tribe, the Sikkim Legislative Assembly in its Session held from 21st to 28th February, 2005, discussed the matter in depth and has passed the resolution granting 'Primitive Tribe Group' status to the aboriginal people – the Lepchas of Sikkim. Thereafter, the notification was issued declaring Lepcha Tribe as Primitive Tribe Group of Sikkim, vide Sikkim Government Gazette Notification No.375 dated 18th November, 2006.

Besides their Constitutional branding of Scheduled Tribe, Lepchas are also differently been defined by different authors or institutions. Followings are some of such categorizations:

- (a) W.W. Hunter (1876) in his book *A Statistical Account of Bengal* mentioned Lepchas under the caption **Aboriginal Tribes of Natives of India**. Their population was 3952 and "they are the aboriginal inhabitants of the hilly portion of the district of Darjeeling. At all events they are first known occupiers of the tract and of independent Sikkim".

- (b) In Census of India for Bengal and Sikkim, 1931, A.E. Porter mentioned Lepchas under one of the 30 **Principal Primitive Tribes** under the statement no XII-1. The population of such hill tribe was 12,719 in 1931.
- (c) J.H. Hutton in his Census of India with Complete Sample Survey of Tribal Life and System vol-1, has mentioned Lepchas under one of the eight categories of **Primitive Tribes** of Bengal with a population of 12,720 in 1931.

Different authors at different times identified them with the following adjectives or ornaments:

- (a) **Primitive** by A.E. Porter, 1931: P-441; J.H. Hutton, 1931: P-503; CRI, Govt of West Bengal, 1982: P-112.
- (b) **Aboriginal** by W.W. Hunter, 1876: P- 45; J.D. Hooker, 1854: P-127; J. C. White, 1909: P-7; E.C. Dozey, 1922: P- 4; L.S.S. O'Malley, 1907 : P- 44.
- (c) **Wild Tribe** by H.B. Rowney, 1882: P – 137.
- (d) **Extremely Under Developed Stage** by Scheduled Area and Scheduled Tribes Commission, Government of India, 1961: P -3.
- (e) **Indigenous Tribe** by K.P. Tamsang, 1983: P -10; S. Ghosh, 1990: P – 11.

A BRIEF PROFILE OF DZONGU

Lepcha call their home land Dzongu as '**Ung Rungfaab-Lho Pundout-Chu Loong Veeng**' as their geographical boundaries of Dzongu under the North district of Sikkim is a T shaped strip of hilly terrain area strategically located in the southern face of Eastern Himalayas. It has international frontier with Nepal in the west, Tibet in the north and borders with other districts of Sikkim in the south and river Teesta in the east. It is situated at 77 km north of Gangtok, the capital of Sikkim and 15 Km north west of Mangan, the headquarter of North Sikkim district. Dzongu is located at 4000 to 7000 feet above sea level and is at the foothills of Mount Khangchendzonga which has been declared as Khangchendzonga National Park. The Mount Khangchendzonga has been inscribed as a world heritage by UNSECO. Due to its geographical and climatic condition, Dzongu is sparsely populated with density of seven person per square km as per 1991 census. The total area covered under Dzongu is 15,845 hectares and the total population is 7745 according to 1981 census. The northern part of Dzongu is reserve forest after which comes first the rhododendron forest and then the snows of Khangchendzonga. The Climate is extremely wet with high rainfall between the months of June to September. The area is divided into lower and upper Dzongu. Dzongu is the home land of Lepcha indigenous tribe of Sikkim. The Lepcha tribe of Dzongu, enumerated by (DESME, 2006), Government of Sikkim is 8797 only. Lepcha believe that their primogenitors were created from the snow of Mount Khangchendzonga and their descendant first settled at the foothills of Khangchendzonga and ultimately spread over to Dzongu and then to other parts of Mayal Lyang, Mayal Lyang, being the original name of Sikkim in Lepcha Language. The Lepchas of Sikkim are known for their indigenous knowledge on eco-system and are the rich repositories of knowledge on their surrounding environment.

Dzongu was identified as protected area vide proclamation by Tashi Namgyal, the then Chogyal of independent Sikkim, in 30th August 1956. The Home Department of Gangtok

pledged to protect Dzongu for the Lepchas and thereby restricted entry of others including those from Sikkim in this area. That the old Laws be respected after the merger was the precondition with India and the Indian Constitution was amended to provide protection. Article 371 – F of Indian Constitution gives special status to Sikkim by respecting the old Laws of the state. Thus established in 1958 till date Dzongu remained as the only protected land for the Lepchas and no community other than the Lepchas can stay there permanently. It is reported that even the Chogyals during their monarchical rule used to offer prayer to Talung Gumba from outside the reserve area. After merger of Sikkim even the Indians needed to get permission from the district authority to enter Dzongu. Anybody can get a temporary permit and allowed to stay inside the Dzongu area for the maximum of six months at a stretch. Land under no circumstances can be sold to any non Lepcha person. Dzongu's special status is thus sacrosanct and protected by the government of India but it is pro Lepcha orientation. Dzongu is administratively divided into lower and upper Dzongu with 8 Gram Panchayat Units (GPUs) consisting of 40 Panchayat wards. The Panchayat wards are:

SN	Name of GPUs	GPU No.	Name of wards	Location
1	Ship Gyer	16	1. Marokchu 2. Gyer 3. Nego 4. Ship 5. Ramom	Upper Dzongu
2	Lingthem Lingdem	17	1. Lingthem 2. Sangkiang Mantam 3. Ruklu Kayem 4. Lingdem 5. Laven	Upper Dzongu
3	Passingdang Saffo	18	1. Salim Pakyel 2. Saffo Liching 3. Leek 4. Nom Panang 5. Passingdang	Upper Dzongu
4	Tingvong	19	1. Tingvong 2. Namprik 3. Lingko 4. Kusung 5. Nung	Upper Dzongu
5	Sakyong Pentong	20	1. Lower Lingzya 2. Upper Lingzya 3. Bey- Tholong 4. Pentong 5. Sakyong	Upper Dzongu

6	Lingdong Barfok	21	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lower Lingdong 2. Upper Lingdong 3. Lower Barfok 4. Upper Barfok 	Lower Dzongu
7	Hee-gyathang	22	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sudur Bringbong 2. Bringkatam Ravong 3. Mantyang Tungkyong 4. Hee-Gyathang 5. Sangdong 6. Gnon 	Lower Dzongu
8	Lum-Gor-Sangtok	23	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Taryang 2. Gor 3. Sangtok 4. Shagyong 5. Lum 	Lower Dzongu

Dzongu remains the centre of attraction for all anthropological and social study of the Lepchas. The first systematic anthropological study 'The Himalayan Village' or 'The Lepchas of Sikkim' (1938) and 'Living with the Lepchas' (1938) were conducted by Geoffrey Gorer and John Morris respectively recorded the field survey of Lepchas of Dzongu. These two even today are the richest and finest anthropological study on the Lepchas. Sumit Ghosal carried out research work for Ph.D. degree on Lingdong village of Dzongu in 1990. The work 'Lingthem Revisited' (1995) by Rip Roshina Gowloog aimed at examining the economic, social and religious changes of the Lepchas of Dzongu after fifty years of Gorer and Morris visit. Most Indian writers on the Lepchas pay visit to Dzongu to gather original information of the Lepchas for their study. Every society's world view implies some conception of human nature and their everyday life interaction. Dzongu area is most scenic and popular for its wilderness, rivers, tributaries, rare species of animals, plants, minerals and other natural resources.

Dzongu is considered most sacred place by the Lepcha original inhabitants as revered and their origins are inextricably intertwined with the landscape. Folk tales, myths, world views are all cantered around in this ecosystem. Dzongu area is also known for its spiritual Masters, who are visionaries about the Nature of Man and Existential world.

Designating of Dzongu as 'Lepcha Indigenous Habitat'

The word primitive relates to the word original; ancient or the root to origin in term of culture tradition and indigenous knowledge system.

Achieving the holistic development of the 'Lepcha Indigenous Habitat' will require achieving the international norms and standards for ensuring that the most marginalized voices are in the centre for planning for development in this region. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which have been adopted in January 2016 lay the foundation for having indigenous people's rights as core mandate of integrating a rights-based approach, keeping in mind, the social, economic and environmental factors for developing the community and region.

The SDGs can be achieved in this region by bringing focus to the rights, culture, historical preservation and removing all forms of poverty and deprivations in the region with Lepcha inhabitants. Ensuring quality education, good healthcare services, removal of all forms of poverty, economic opportunities and environmental protection will lead to the large scale sustainable development and preservation of rights and indigenous culture. Developing a special demarcation of Dzongu as "**Lepcha Indigenous Habitat**" may lead to the holistic development of the region and community. This will lead to developing targeted interventions and strategies which lead to; the economic and social upliftment of indigenous communities, while upholding their historically significant culture, art and history; and protecting the environment in which these communities have inhabited for centuries.

Most indigenous communities around the world hold traditional means of living, rituals and practices, which promote sustainability at its core. Similarly, the aim of the Lepcha Indigenous Habitat would be to develop a SDG Complaint Model Area, which integrates the concepts of localizing the SDGs, by providing all amenities, social services, promotion and preservation of art, culture and sustainable practices to create a SDG Model Region.

The recommendations and suggestions of the Primitive Tribe Welfare Board on branding of Dzongu as "**Lepcha Indigenous Habitat**" are as under:

1. DEVELOPING A SDG COMPLIANT REGION:

In order to achieve equality in this region, the people in the Dzongu area should have access to the following:

- Quality education
- Good health care, clean drinking water and sanitation facilities
- Well equipped housing, Community management of land and resources
- Promoting organic, sustainable farming practices and tourism
- Developing a self-subsistent community, electricity and other basic services to all. Adequate economic opportunities for all
- No social evils such as child marriage, violence against women and children, abuse of alcohol or use of drugs
- Promotion of sports and other cultural activities
- Developing livelihood opportunities by promoting indigenous arts, crafts, forming and music
- Mitigation against climate change and preparedness for natural disasters
- Create a repository of knowledge in this region
- Data disaggregation in the state level with monitorable indicators to check the progress of the community with respect to the different SDGs.

A proper mapping of the resources, amenities and geographical assessment will be required to plan and develop the region as per achievement of the SDG and state norms. Partnership can be developed with international and local organizations who are working on SDGs to develop the model plan for this region. Gap and needs assessment studies may need to be carried out for proper planning and implementation of programmes and projects.

2. SHOWCASING THE HERITAGE AND CUSTOMS BY ORGANIZATION OF FAIRS, FESTIVALS AND RITUALS:

The Lepcha life style of Dzongu can be promoted by spreading awareness on the uniqueness of the Lepcha culinary traditions, culture, history through organizing various events such as food, culture festival's, nature tours, folk tales, songs, dance and music involving all sections of community through their participations in conserving age old traditions passed down from generation to generations. The annual calendar of events will be given wide publicity at national and international level through electronic, print and web based media advertisement. This would not only help in promoting sustainable tourism but also assist in developing the economy of this region. The annual calendar events of Dzongu are:

S N	Months	Name of events
1	January	Chalum Dambro Kurtut Festival to celebrate Orange harvest
2	February, March & April	Lyang Rum Faat (Muk Zekding RumFaat) Worship of mother nature for good ecology
3	May	Tukpoboor Rum faat (Padim Rum Kuk Rum Faat) worship of Mentor creator God
4	June-July	Oung Rum Faat rituals to avoid calamity
5	August	Tendong Lho Rum Faat Thanks giving rituals to Tendong hill for saving the lives of Lepchas
6	September	Mipong Rum Faat
7	October	Sugilyout/Songbing festival
8	November	Thikung Munsolong (Lepcha historical hero) Commemoration day celebration.
9	December	Sosa Kurtut/Namprikdang Namsoong festival

The funds are made available through various financial and other related institutions to materialize the above objectives.

3. DOCUMENTATION OF ORAL LEPCHA HISTORY AND CULTURE

The various aspects of the Lepcha culture, traditions, including names of important places and personalities should be documented through proper research and should be published through books/interactive literature/blogs among other sources and promoted both in electronic and print form by engaging local knowledgeable persons with the help of other line experts. The various aspects to be incorporated primarily in documentation are as under:

- a. Folk tales
- b. Songs, dance and music
- c. Ritual specialist
- d. Lepcha customary laws
- e. Indigenous knowledge on flora and fauna/medicinal plants

- f. Historical/worship sites
- g. Art of weaving handloom/handicrafts/cane and bamboo
- h. Names of places and rivers
- i. Unwritten oral literature
- j. Origin of clan and its family tree
- k. Old and calligraphed manuscript
- l. Arts and artefacts
- m. The art of making Cane Bridge.

Some important names of the places associated with Lepcha civilization that plays the role of guardian deities located within the geographical bounds of Dzongu which need immediate attention in terms of documentation are:

- i. Kishung Lake
- ii. Kongchen Chu
- iii. Langum Chu
- iv. Linghi Chu
- v. Lingthem
- vi. Lungam Chu
- vii. Lungko Cave
- viii. Manik Chu
- ix. Nung Longchok
- x. Pongyong Chu
- xi. Pram Pung
- xii. Rungdok Chu
- xiii. Sunglyot Chu
- xiv. Songbing
- xv. Thulong/Thigong
- xvi. Turbong Narik Purtam.

The important personalities who immensely contributed in bringing Dzongu to the present shape are:

- i. Atang Lepcha, was known as "Brave Soldier"
- ii. Loden Tshering Lepcha the first MLA of Dzongu
- iii. Junggi Tasho Lepcha, Khangchendzonga Bongthing
- iv. Samdup Tasho Lepcha, Khangchendzonga Bongthing.

Various institutions, autonomous bodies, Boards and other institutions can be approached for their expertise and funding for documentation of the above aspects of Lepcha ways of living and places of their importance.

4. PROMOTION OF ART OF WEAVING THROUGH TRAINING FOR THEIR LIVELIHOOD

The Lepchas are known for their art of weaving. The local master craftsmen will be identified and training of trainers should be arranged in an organised manner. The required raw materials and equipments will be provided to encourage local artisans helping them to take their products to national and international markets by extending financial support to attend national and international marketing fairs and festivals, buyer seller meet. Major activities are:

- i. Weaving of Lepcha Thokro Dum
- ii. Sumok Thyaktuk, Lepcha hat
- iii. Cane and bamboo works
- iv. Weaving through nettle fibre.

Funds to be made available to local artisan to procure raw materials machinery and equipments after training to increase production. Regular training to be given to local artisan to enable them to upgrade their skill through workshops and training in institutes where their skills can be improved.

5. PROMOTION OF LEPCHA LANGUAGE

Promotion and preservation of Lepcha language and literature with a provision of translators / interpreters and ensuring proficiency in four skills of Lepcha language. Weekly news paper can be published and the concept of community radio can be introduced in Lepcha language.

6. Ensure construction of **Lee Voon** or **Rong Lungteen Lee** i.e. Lepcha traditional house in each Lepcha household.
7. Promotion of Lepcha dress by both male and female.
8. Promotion of Lepcha Customary Law.
9. Encourage the use of culture.
10. Use of Mun, Bongthing, Peeboo and Pamiboo are encouraged. Arrangement of workshop/training for Mun, Bongthing, Peeboo, Byekboo and Pamiboo.
11. Encourage the use of *Moo, Chu, Da* and *Lep*.
12. Arrangement of seminar/workshop on Lepcha culture, custom, tradition at regular interval.
13. Stress on awarding typical Lepcha personal names to all new born babies.
14. Identification and recognition of Lepcha 'Moan Doak' medicine man as folk healer by providing them proper place to work and demonstrate their knowledge on ethno medicine. Orientation of youths on ethno medicine to be encouraged by providing honorarium.

15. Restoration of original Lepcha names of Rivers and villages.
16. Promotion of indigenous Lepcha methods of fishing in the rivers. Traditional food exhibitions and live demonstration of cooking.
17. Restoration of old structures.
18. Visit to Lepcha historical worship places and Longchok.
19. Promotion of Lepcha art of weaving handlooms, handicrafts, cane and bamboo works.
20. Conduct of traditional Games/sports/promotion of home stays/bird watching/ tracking/ promotion of Lepcha indigenous knowledge system on disaster mitigation.
21. Establishment of well equipped library in Dzongu.
22. Encouragement of organic cultivation such as paddy cultivation without irrigation. This variety of paddy to be tested through ICAR to identify the nutritional values so that this variety can be introduced in other areas of the State.
23. Establishment of museum of natural history within the Dzongu area.
24. A residential education of children of Dzongu area needs to be encouraged in the available infrastructure.
25. Re strengthening and encouragement of social management system/community based resource management system of Yumee – Gyapon system in village administration. Incentives to be provided for maintenance of this age old tradition.
26. Mapping of resources and preparation of vision document 2030 for Dzongu and Lepchas of Sikkim for sustainable development of this region. The critical infrastructure gap will be taken into account while formulating the vision document 2030".

By order and in the name of the Governor.

K. Sreenivasulu, IAS
Principal Secretary
Social Justice, Empowerment and Welfare Department